

52. Protection of bhakti lata

Lord Caitanya pointed out to Rūpa Gosvāmī that there was a certain danger to be encountered while watering the root of the devotional plant. After a plant has grown somewhat, an animal may come and either eat it or destroy it. When the green leaves of a plant are eaten by some animal, the plant generally dies. Thus one has to take precautions so that the plant of devotional service is not disturbed by animals, which represent offenses. The most dangerous animal is a mad elephant, for if a mad elephant enters a garden, it causes tremendous damage to plants and trees. An offense to a pure devotee of the Lord is called vaiṣṇava-aparādha, the mad elephant offense. In the discharge of devotional service, an offense to the feet of a pure devotee creates havoc and stops one's advancement. Thus one has to defend the plant of bhakti by fencing it off properly and taking care not to offend pure devotees. Then the plant of devotional service will be properly protected.

There are still other factors which can disturb the plant of devotional service. As this plant grows, the weeds of material desires may also grow. When a person advances in devotional service, it is natural that many persons will come to him requesting to become disciples and will offer him some material gains. If one is attracted by a large number of disciples offering material conveniences and forgets his duty as a bona fide spiritual master, the growth of the plant will be impeded. Simply by taking advantage of material conveniences one may become addicted to enjoying material comforts.

Other impediments are to desire liberation or material name and fame by discharging devotional service, or to neglect the prohibitions. These prohibitions are mentioned in the authorized scriptures: One should not indulge in illicit sex, intoxication, gambling or eating meat—indeed, one should not eat anything other than kṛṣṇa-prasādam, food offered to Kṛṣṇa. These are the restrictions for one who is attempting to advance in devotional service. If one does not follow these principles strictly, there will be a severe disturbance in the discharge of devotional service.

If one is not particularly careful, by watering the plant of devotional service one will instead nourish the weeds described above, which will then grow very luxuriantly and hamper one's progress. The idea is that when one waters a garden, not only does the desired plant grow rapidly but the unwanted plants grow also. If the gardener does not see these weeds and cut them down, they will overcome and choke the plant of devotion. It is thus the duty of the neophyte devotee to cut down all the weeds that may grow by the watering process of devotional service. If one is careful to guard against the growth of these weeds, the plant of devotion will grow luxuriantly and reach the ultimate goal, Goloka Vṛndāvana.

Lord Caitanya explained to Rupa Goswami that in pure devotional service there can be no desire other than the desire to advance in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In Kṛṣṇa consciousness there is no scope for worshiping any demigod or even any other form of Kṛṣṇa, nor is there room for indulgence in speculative empiric philosophy or fruitive activities. One should be free from all these contaminations. A devotee should accept only those things that are favorable for keeping his body and soul together and should reject those things that increase the demands of the body. Only the bare necessities for bodily maintenance should be accepted. By making one's bodily necessities secondary, one can primarily devote his time to the cultivation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness through the chanting of the holy names of God. Pure devotional service means engaging all one's senses in the service of the Lord. At the present moment our senses are all designated because the body is designated. So we think that our body belongs to a particular society or a particular country or a particular family. In this way the body is bound by so many designations. Similarly, the senses belong to the body, and when the body is subject to such designations, the senses are also. Thus one engages the senses on behalf of family, society, nation and so on. When the senses are so engaged, one cannot cultivate Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The senses must be purified, and this is possible when one purely understands that he belongs to Kṛṣṇa and that his life belongs to Kṛṣṇa—in other words, that his identity is to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. In this way one can engage his senses in the service of the Lord, and such engagement is called pure devotional service.

(Extract from Teachings of Lord Caitanya Chapter 1)

Discovery

1. What were the dangers Caitanya Mahāprabhu that is encountered while watering the root of the devotional plant?
2. What are the other impediments in the discharge of devotional service?
3. Along with the creeper of *bhakti* what else grows?
4. Is the body bound by any designations? If so, what?
5. Why should one be careful while watering the devotional plant?
6. What are the restrictions for one who is attempting to advance in devotional service?

Understanding

1. What is the mad elephant offense?
2. How does one defend the plant of *bhakti*?
3. How do the weeds of material desires disturb the plant of devotional service?
4. What is pure devotional service?
5. What is the duty of a neophyte devotee?
6. How can the senses be purified?

Application

Please list down the impediments that you have identified while you engage in devotional service. How do you plan to overcome them?

SRI NAMAMRTA

Guru-aparādha is the most grievous offense against the holy name:

While describing the system of protection for the creeper of devotional service, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu has especially stressed protection from offenses unto the lotus feet of Vaiṣṇavas. Such offenses are called vaiṣṇava-aparādha. Aparādha means "offense." If one commits vaiṣṇava-aparādhas, all of his progress in devotional service will be checked. Even though one is very much advanced in devotional service, if he commits offenses at the feet of a Vaiṣṇava, his advancement is all spoiled.... Therefore one should be very careful about committing offenses at the feet of a Vaiṣṇava. The most grievous type of vaiṣṇava-aparādha is called guru-aparādha, which refers to offenses at the lotus feet of the spiritual master. In the chanting of the holy name of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, this guru-aparādha is considered the most grievous offense.

(ŚB 4.21.37)

PREACHING IS THE ESSENCE

The devotee is fully protected by following Lord Caitanya's orders:

If one simply follows the instructions of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, under the guidance of His representative, and chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, teaching everyone as far as possible the same principle, the contamination of the materialistic way of life will not even touch him. It does not matter whether one lives in a holy place like Vṛndāvana, Navadvīpa or Jagannātha Purī or in the midst of European cities where the materialistic way of life is very prominent. If a devotee follows the instructions of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, he lives in the company of the Lord. Wherever he lives, he converts that place into Vṛndāvana and Navadvīpa. This means that materialism cannot touch him. This is the secret of success for one advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

(CC. Madhya 7.129)

Handout 1 for Lesson 52-Protection of bhakti lata

Weeding in the garden of chanting

While the neophyte chants the holy name of the Lord to cultivate the creeper of devotional service (*bhakti-lata*), weeds might also start to grow. They are classified as follows:

1. *Nisiddhacara*: Actions that are prohibited in the *sastras* (scriptures) and which must be strictly avoided by a person who wants to attain perfection.
2. *Kutinati*: Diplomacy and duplicity, like the propensity to find faults or to pretend to be an important devotee. This behavior satisfies neither the body nor the mind or the soul.
3. *Jiva himsa*: Not only killing animals but also envying other living entities. Srila Prabhupada renders an additional meaning:
The word *jiva-himsa* actually means stopping the preaching of Krsna consciousness. Preaching work is described as *para-upakara*, welfare activity for others. Those who are ignorant of the benefits of devotional service must be educated by preaching. If one stops preaching and simply sits down in a solitary place, he is engaging in material activity.
4. *Labha*: The desire for material gain.
5. *Puja*: Striving for popularity and admiration.
6. *Pratishta*: The desire to become an important person in the material world, and other material desires as well, as Srila Prabhupada explains:
A neophyte devotee is certain to be attacked by other material desires as well – women and money. In this way the heart is again filled with dirty things and becomes harder and harder, like that of a materialist. Gradually one desires to become a reputed devotee or an *avatara* (incarnation).

By summarizing the six weeds in the garden of life, Srila Prabhupada explains how to distinguish those weeds from the *bhakti-lata*:

These unwanted creepers simply present obstacles for the real creeper, the *bhakti-lata*. One should be very careful to avoid all these unwanted things. Sometimes these unwanted creepers look exactly like the *bhakti-lata* creeper. They appear to be of the same size and the same species when they are packed together with the *bhakti-lata* creeper, but in spite of this, the creepers are called *upasakha* (weed).

A pure devotee can distinguish between the *bhakti lata* creeper and a mundane creeper and he is very alert to distinguish them and keep them stay separate.

(Extract from the Nectarean Ocean of the Holy name Section VI Chapter 2 – page 134)

Hand out 2 for Lesson 52 -Protection of bhakti lata

By emphasizing positive spiritual practices, the negative ones will automatically disappear. Srila Prabhupada used to say that a devotee should be so busy in Krsna's service that he has no time for maya. A devotee who is busy crying out to Krsna, and sincerely trying to improve his japa will have no time to commit offenses.

On the other hand, a devotee, who is always afraid of making offenses and constantly dwells on them, surrounds himself with negative aura. His mentality fills with the "mistake syndrome", and prevents him from clearly thinking of the holy name. One acarya advises his followers not to worry so much about offenses. He says one needs only to chant attentively with a humble heart, contemplate the meanings of the holy name, and remember Krsna's *vraja lilas*.

When discussing the correct method of chanting japa, Srila Prabhupada generally advised his disciples to "just to hear the name." In Bhagavad-gita, Sri Krsna orders Arjuna to do the same, *tat srnu*. "Just hear Me." Once a disciple told Srila Prabhupada that it is very difficult to control the wandering mind during *japa*. In reply Prabhupada said, "What is the use of controlling the mind? You have to chant and hear, that's all. You have to chant with your tongue and the sound you hear, that's all. What is the question of mind?" (Srila Prabhupada's Morning Walks 3/2/1975)

Although Srila Prabhupada makes it sound easy, the mind is a formidable enemy to control. The ability to "just hear" with concentration and attention depends on the purity of one's mind. In the following purport Srila Prabhupada admits that attentive hearing depends on purity in thought and action:

"No one can give rapt attention who is not pure in mind. No one can be pure in mind who is not pure in action. No one can be pure in action who is not pure in eating, sleeping, fearing and mating." (SB 1.3.44 p.)

If the mind is full of passionate desires, however, one cannot concentrate on anything for more than a second. The mind is often compared to a monkey because it jumps from one thought to another. In the Bhagavad-gita, the mind is compared to a raging wind because it is flickering and always moving (*cancala*). It is also compared to a mad elephant in rut because of its lusty impetuosity.

By developing the power of concentration, one can make rapid spiritual advancement. Besides concentration, the word *dharana* also means to hold, grasp or support. Concentration is impossible without something for the mind to grasp or hold on to.

In deep concentration the senses become still; one loses awareness of the body and his surroundings. For example, when one is engrossed in reading a favourite book, he will not hear if someone calls his name or even stands before him. Such one-pointedness of the mind is called *ekagrata* in yoga.

Because of *samskaras* (mental impressions from previous experiences), it is easy to concentrate the mind on material objects. The mind has a natural tendency to go outwards through the senses to embrace the external world. For example, due to habit, the mind of a man will spontaneously and with great attention concentrate on the form of a beautiful woman. Instant *samadhi*!

Whenever useless or sinful thought waves arise while chanting japa, they should be immediately replaced with positive thoughts. Such action will create new mental habits conducive to spiritual advancement.

In other words, one should replace thoughts of enjoyment with thoughts of service. For example, if while chanting japa you think about exploiting someone for sense pleasure, you can reverse that thought by thinking how to serve and help that person become Krsna conscious.

When one begins to concentrate, he has to coax the mind just as one coaxes an ignorant child. Speak to the mind: "Oh mind, you stupid monkey! Why are you always jumping here and there to foolish ideas and

suggestions? Pursuing these material thoughts will only bring you and me endless suffering. Look at Radha Syamasundara – the ultimate beauty, the perfect Divine Couple – radiating joy, compassion and love.”

Cherishing memories of sensual pleasures while chanting revives the false ego and fills one with the “I am the enjoyer” spirit. At times like this, one must reinforce his *seva vritti*(thoughts for service) by repeatedly telling himself: *aham brahmasmi, krsnera nitya dasa*, “I am not this body! I am pure spirit soul, part and parcel of Krsna! I am not the enjoyer, I am nothing but Krsna’s eternal servant!”

Be indifferent when nonsense ideas or sinful thoughts arise. Do not welcome them with open arms. Bad thoughts will disappear by not identifying with them, and by telling yourself with conviction: “I do not want these thoughts. I have nothing to do with these thoughts.” Gradually the mind will give up its nasty habits, and happily honor Krsna’s name and hold on to His lotus feet. This is *dharana* or concentration in *japa*.

As soon as one sits for *japa* meditation, all sorts of nonsensical thoughts will manifest to disturb the mind. An astonishing parade of old memories, past enjoyments, future schemes and tasty scenarios will bubble up from the subconscious to spin the mind in a whirlwind of distraction. Thoughts of people, desires and things will gush out in a continuous stream from the sub-conscious reservoir. One should throw out these material thoughts just as one uproots weeds from the ground. One should fill the garden of the mind with divine thoughts of Krsna’s eternal service and memories of His splendid pastimes.

The determined and continuous chanting of Krsna’s holy names will eventually purify the mind, intelligence and ego. It is only after such purification that further chanting and meditation on the Hare Krsna *maha-mantra* will yield the fruit of spiritual realization and love of God.

(Extract from Art of Chanting Hare Krsna, Japa meditation techniques, by Mahanidhi Swami, Chapter Ten – Yoga Techniques of Concentration)